Messages for Laymen

on

JESUS CHRIST IS LORD

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By EWART G. WATTS

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MESSAGES

for

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on

"Jesus Christ Is Lord"

by

EWART G. WATTS

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FOREWORD

Every few days, our newspapers tell us about some person who has been picked up by the police who does not know who he is. He does not know his name. We say that he is the victim of amnesia. This is a real tragedy. Our heart goes out to such a person.

Many of us may also be the tragic victims of amnesia. We call ourselves *Christians* but there is increasing evidence on every hand that many of us have forgotten who we are and whose we are. At a time when more people belong to churches in this country than ever before, the crime rate is at an all-time high, the number of illegitimate births is greater than ever, divorce continues to increase, business executives and labor leaders are convicted of crookedness and collusion, schools and colleges report that many students have no scruples about cheating on examination, we have more saloons than churches, and far more money spent on alcohol and tobacco than on churches and service agencies. I wonder if we really know who we are? Spiritual amnesia seems to be the real tragedy of our time.

The General Conference of The Methodist Church was right when it said, the one thing our Church must do is to reaffirm the lordship of Jesus Christ. Anyone who joins the church must answer one basic question. The minister says, "Do you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord and pledge your allegiance to his Kingdom?" The candidate for membership must answer, "I do." Thus, will you join with me in asking just what it means to accept Jesus Christ as Lord?

A good many years ago, Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick preached a great sermon on "The Peril of Worshiping Jesus." He showed how easy it is to make the adoration of Jesus a substitute for fac-

ing the challenge of the gospel in the real areas of life. We get rid of him by calling him, "Lord, Lord," and ignoring the things he says. Or we put him safely away in orthodox creeds which we recite with great fervor, but whose implications we ignore in our daily lives. We honor him with our lips while our lives are far from him.

This is one of the great dangers. It is good to recall the past and to re-live those last days of Jesus; but, unless we are very careful, this can lead to the very thing Dr. Fosdick was talking about. We can spend so much time worshiping a dead Christ, we forget that ours is a living Lord. He calls us to follow him NOW. He calls us to live for him NOW.

I

Lord of Our Time

"Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus."
—Phil. 2:5

"Make the best use of your time, despite all the difficulties of these days."—Eph. 5:16 (Phillips)

Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus, "Make the best use of your time, despite all the difficulties of these days"; and to the Christians in Philippi he wrote, "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus." He was deeply conscious that his time was a sacred trust—something which he could not afford to waste. He wrote, "I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air." [1] In this Paul was simply being true to the spirit of the Christ he served.

There is a sense of urgency about Jesus' life which is obvious from the beginning. As a boy, his eager questioning of the teachers in the temple shows how anxious he was to make his youth a real time of preparation; and that is what he meant when he asked his parents, "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" Jesus began his ministry with a real note of urgency. His first word was a call for action. Mark says, he came preaching: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." [2] From that point on, there is no brooking of delay. The call is for action now. Once, when the disciples reminded Jesus that he should at least

[1] I Cor. 9:26.
[2] Mark 1:15.

take time to eat, he replied, "My food is to do the will of him that sent me." Another time, when Jesus broke through the restrictions of the Sabbath to heal a man, and was severely criticized for desecrating the day of rest, he replied, "My Father is at work, and I work too."

This does not mean that Jesus was like one of these folks who is always looking at his watch and rushing off to another appointment. Have you seen the signs which some of the novelty shops are displaying: "The hurrier I go, the behinder I get"? Although Jesus was a careful steward of his time, he always seemed to have time for the people who needed him—the mothers who wanted him to bless their children, the Samaritan woman by the well, the crowd of people who followed him to the other side of the lake, and many others. You see, Jesus never wasted time, but neither did he make other people feel like they were wasting his time when they needed his help.

There is another element in Jesus' stewardship of time which should be noticed. He was careful to maintain a balance between prayer and action. No matter how pressing the demands might be, he made a place for prayer and meditation. He knew that prayer was just as necessary to maintain spiritual strength as food was to maintain physical strength. The disciples soon learned not to be surprised if they awakened at daylight and Jesus was not with them. He often got up before daylight and went out on some hillside to pray. And they soon realized this was the true secret of his power. So, one day, they came to him saying, "Lord, teach us to pray." It is significant that they did not say, "Teach us to preach, or teach us to heal." They said, "Teach us to pray."

But Jesus not only made time for prayer and for people, he also made time for fun and fellowship. He enjoyed mixing and mingling with the common people. His first miracle was performed at a wedding party. Many of his parables were told at dinner parties. In fact, his gay life was so startling to some of the puritans of his

day that they called him a "glutton" and a "wine-bibber." Of course, these were slanders; but they could never have been circulated unless Jesus had been a jolly person who enjoyed fun and laughter. What a perversion of Christ it is to picture him as one who takes all the fun out of life! He said, "I am come that they might have life and have it abundantly."

Another part of Jesus' balanced use of time was the fact that he took time for rest and sleep. Sometimes as one reads the New Testament accounts of his all-night prayer vigils, there is danger of thinking that he was a superman who never needed to sleep. But there are a few incidents which help us to see the truth about his life. One of these is that time when he almost slept through a storm on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples were terribly frightened, but Jesus slept. He worked hard; but he evidently had the ability to relax and sleep whenever he had a chance. Perhaps he was like the old Negro lady who raised a large family of children. Someone asked her secret and she said, "When I works, I works hard; and when I sets, I sets loose." Jesus lived by God's plan, and this plan calls for regular sleep and rest.

Of course, different people require different amounts of sleep. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, did some experimenting as a young man to determine just how much sleep he really needed. He soon discovered that he could get along fine on about five or six hours sleep a night. So, for the rest of his life, he made it a habit to get up at four o'clock in the morning, and to spend an hour in prayer and Bible reading. If you will visit his home next to Wesley's Chapel on City Road in London, you can see the small prayer room which is right next to his bedroom. To me, this room is the symbol of a dedicated and disciplined life. Here was a man who wrote around eighty books, averaged preaching four or five times every day for fifty years, traveled so extensively that one historian said he paid more toll road fares than any man of his generation; and all this was possible because he believed

in giving Christ every minute of every day with "sixty seconds worth of distance run."

Methodist ministers are reminded of their duty to do the same before they are admitted into membership of an Annual Conference. The presiding Bishop is required to read to them these words of John Wesley: "Be diligent. Never be unemployed. Never be triflingly employed. Never trifle away time. Neither spend any more time at any one place than is strictly necessary. Be punctual. Do everything exactly at the time." These are our marching orders.

Before you start saying, "I'm sure glad I don't have to promise anything like that"; remember that we believe in the priesthood of all believers. This means that both laymen and ministers are under the same marching orders. Each of us is called to accept Christ as Lord of our time and of every other area of our life. Did you see Chon Day's "Brother Sebastian" cartoon that shows Brother Sebastian, the Franciscan monk, painting a sign outside the monastery door? It reads: "Friars Wanted, 168-Hour Week. No Salary. No Holidays. No Pension Plan. No Sick Benefits."

We smile at that; but I wonder: Isn't the whole message of the New Testament one that could be summarized by a picture of Jesus painting a sign which reads: "Disciples Wanted. 168-Hour Week. No Salary. No Holidays"? Isn't that exactly what he meant when he said, "Follow me"? Isn't that what Paul meant when he wrote, "Make the best use of your time, despite all the difficulties of these days"? Isn't that what is meant when you answer the vow of church membership which says, "Will you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and pledge your allegiance to his Kingdom"? You see, the New Testament makes no allowance for part-time disciples. We are to be Christ's, 168 hours of every week.

Usually we think of this call in terms of what we do on our jobs, in our daily work. We have taken our cue from Martin Luther in saying that all work is a sacred calling—a vocation.

Now this is good. This emphasis needs to be continued. But we are now coming into an age which calls for a new emphasis. For the first time in history, the common man can become a member of the leisure class. Automation, in industry and on the farm, means that more and more people are going to have at their disposal substantial stretches of time in which they can do as they please. For centuries, men have had to spend most of their time and money just to provide such elemental necessities as food, clothing and shelter; but now, in this country, most people are able to do this on a forty-hour, five-day week—and the four-day week appears to be a live-option for many in the near future.

The growing amount of leisure or "discretionary" time is shown by the fact that most television sets are now turned on four or five hours every day. We also know that the American people spend $40 billion each year on leisure-time activities. This is fifteen percent of total consumer expenditures. Travel bureaus report that more people are taking long trips than ever before. The amusement industry is rapidly becoming the largest in our economy. It all boils down to the fact that we are coming into a time where the big question is not going to be, "How can I find time?" but "How can I kill time?"

This means we are on the verge of a real moral crisis. Man has more freedom of choice on how he is to use his time than ever before, unless it might be the time when Roman citizens had much leisure time because they had thousands of slaves to do their work. Many historians feel that this was one of the reasons for the fall of Rome. They say that the character of Roman citizens was so weakened by the perverse use of leisure time that they did not have the moral or physical strength to resist the hungry hordes of barbarians. Of course, history does not have to repeat itself; but it certainly could do so. Today we have abolished human slavery; but we have a new kind of slave to do our work for us. Modern machines, with their almost-human electronic con-

trols, are doing for us what slaves did for the citizens of Rome, and it's up to us to choose whether we are going the way of Rome or not.

The increased amount of leisure time can be a blessing or it can be a curse. It can mean that we have more time for doing wholesome things together as families, more time for working in the church and in church-sponsored service projects, more time for work with Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Y. M. and Y. W. C. A.'s and other character-building agencies, more time for creative expression through music and art, more time for intelligent and devoted participation in politics, and many other constructive activities. On the other hand, it may mean only that we have more time to spend at the cocktail bar or the race track, more time for long week ends at the lake, in the mountains, or on the seashore just to get away from family or church or community responsibilities, more time to sit in front of television sets and let someone else make us laugh or cry, more time to sit back and let someone else take over the government responsibilities, asking what can my country do for me instead of asking what can I do for my country.

There has never been a time when God has given man a more important choice than that which we face. There are tremendous possibilities for creative, abundant living, but there is also the ominous possibility of empty, degraded, meaningless living.

The ancient words of Moses to his people take on fresh meaning. In his last speech to them he said: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live." [3]

We have one great advantage over those to whom Moses was speaking. In Jesus Christ, God has shown us how to make wise

[3] Deuteronomy 30:19.

use of our time and our talents. He has given us a picture of wholesome, balanced living which keeps saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the light." Even more than that, God has raised Jesus from the dead and made him a living Lord—one who will walk by our side and give us the strength to live as we know we ought to live. So, if we are actually willing to accept him as the companion of all our ways, as the Lord of every hour of our days, we can find the abundant life that he promised, the only kind of joy that endures. To paraphrase William Law: "Whatever you can do, or enjoy, as in His presence, as His servant, as His rational creature . . . this is what God wants you to do."[4] I call you to accept Jesus Christ as the Lord of your time!

[4] Law, William, *A Call to a Devout and Holy Life.*

II

Lord of Our Minds

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your . . . mind. . . .
—Matt. 22:37

". . . the truth shall make you free."—John 8:32

One of the common misconceptions about religion is the feeling of many people that the most religious person is the one who can believe the most unbelievable things, and that true faith eliminates all doubts. For some, this leads to an attitude of contempt toward religion, because they think of the religious man as being like the country yokel at the carnival. He is an easy touch for every shell game on the midway. He will believe anything and everything. For others, there is almost an attitude of yearning envy. They see how easy it appears for some people to believe, and they say to themselves, "I wish I could have that kind of faith. I wish I could get rid of these doubts."

We would challenge both of these attitudes and point out why it is a misconception to feel that when a man walks in the church door he is expected to leave his mind along with his hat and coat out in the hall. This conception of faith is a complete twisting of what Jesus meant. It is true that Jesus pointed to the limits of men's minds. He said: "O ye of little faith . . . if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Be thou removed.' " But, he certainly did not mean that men are to ignore or disregard their minds. The only difference between the first great commandment as Jesus gave it and as it is found in Deuteronomy is the addition of the word "mind." He said: "You are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your *mind*." John quotes Jesus as saying,

"the truth shall make you free"; and Jesus told Pilate that his one mission was to bear witness to the truth.

Further, Jesus did not spoon-feed those he taught. He challenged them to think for themselves. This was the whole purpose of his parables. They are stories with such deep and far-reaching implications that they have challenged the best minds of every generation. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was asking men to do some clear, hard thinking with him. In effect, he was saying: "For centuries now you have been accepting these things just because they were supposed to be the law of Moses; but, wait a minute, stop and think with me. Are these laws right? Are they true? You have been told, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy; but I say unto you, Love your enemy, pray for those who despitefully use you."

On other occasions, Jesus did the same thing with the accepted beliefs about observance of the Sabbath. He asked them to go back and think about the origin of the Sabbath. What was its real purpose? Wasn't the Sabbath made for man, not man for the Sabbath? How, then, could they say that it was wrong to heal and to help men on the Sabbath?

If ever a man challenged men to use their minds, to do clear, hard thinking, Jesus did. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "I am not come to bring peace but a sword." He was asking men to think through the full implications of their commitment. They were to love God—not just with their hearts, their souls, their physical strength—they were to love Him with every bit of their brain power as well. They were to keep asking themselves: "What does this mean? Where does this lead? What are my obligations?"

Dr. Ralph W. Sockman suggests that this kind of love for God is very much like the feeling of an honest and sincere man who falls in love with a beautiful woman. He loves her and ultimately he wants to marry her, but his head as well as his heart enters

into this love. In fact, he must use his head if his love is to be lasting and satisfying. He tries to learn all he can about the one he loves. He tries to see her as often as possible. He reads and rereads her letters. He uses his imagination to anticipate her desires. He talks about her to other people. He tries to think of ways in which he can best prepare for their happy marriage. In short, his deep love for her makes him use his mind more fully and more creatively than ever.

So it is with our love for God. It does not take a great mind to love God, but it takes *all* the mind we have. It calls us to do what John Wesley proposed as his goal—to unite the two so long divided: knowledge and vital piety. Today we would say *mind and heart.*

So, true faith, true discipleship, does not call for a blind, unquestioning, unthinking loyalty, anymore than true love calls for blind, unthinking, impetuous passion. Jesus clearly did not want men to follow him just with their hearts. He wanted the full commitment of their minds also; and so, his invitation was always reasonable. In effect, he was saying, "I invite you to follow this way, because I believe you will find it is true and right." John put it, "If any man will to do His will, he shall know." (7:17) In other words, Jesus was saying: "I know this is true. If you will give it a fair trial, I know you will find it to be true also."

This is very much like the appeal of one scientist to another. He says: "I know this theory is true. I have tested it in my laboratory in every way that I know. If you will accept it and test it, as I have, I know you will find it to be true also."

So, faith is not a delusion of weak minds that do not have the courage to face boldly the true nature of the material universe, but is, as Dr. Paul Tillich says:

> "The centered movement of the whole personality toward something which is felt to be of ultimate meaning and signifi-

cance. . . . If reason is grasped by an ultimate concern, it is driven beyond itself; but it does not cease to be reason." [1]

This means that, just because a man has accepted Christ and has committed himself to Christ, it is no sign that he will stop thinking and asking questions. Rather, it means that his whole mind will be completely and unequivocally dedicated to doing Christ's will and helping to build his Kingdom. In Paul's words, he will seek the constant "renewing of his mind" by checking his thinking with the mind and the spirit of the living Christ.

If God is light, our minds must be clear and sharp so as properly to reflect that light. A clear mirror is a better reflector than one that is dingy or dusty. So it is that we find a man like Dr. Albert Schweitzer, with one of the keenest minds of our generation, using every ounce of his brain power to heal and to help the natives of Equatorial Africa; and also we find him using his great mind to give the world a definitive interpretation of the music of Bach. Again, we find him using it to write a study of the life and teachings of Jesus which challenged many previous interpretations. In another field, we find Dr. George Washington Carver using his scientific genius to create scores of new uses for peanuts and sweet potatoes, since these were about the only crops which could be grown in the sandy, clay soil where so many of his people were trying to eke out a living. Likewise, we find Dr. Charles Malik, a brilliant philosopher, devoting his best thinking and his time to the United Nations because, as a Christian, he believes that this is where he can best serve Christ. Here, his keen analysis of problems, his fair-mindedness, and his brilliant oratory led to his election as President of the General Assembly.

Dr. Malik writes in *Together* magazine about the responsibilities of the Christian in today's world, and he says concerning his first responsibility:

[1] Tillich, Paul, *Dynamics of Faith*, p. 106.

> "I must study the facts about the world. This means knowledge that is profound, acquired only by hours of hard work. . . . I will avoid being shallow and sentimental, because I know the Christian thinker must be the world's deepest thinker. . . . I must witness to Jesus Christ in the midst of change. This is my supreme responsibility."

The life and the words of this great statesman are a clear refutation of the notion that great faith means great gullibility and blind credulity.

Jesus said that we are to love God with our *whole* mind—with all the knowledge and the wisdom we can acquire through hard work and careful consideration of all the facts—and there is no ducking of this responsibility. If faith means being ultimately concerned that God's will may be done on earth as it can be seen in Jesus Christ, then mere sentiment and feeling is not enough.

My love for Christ must be directed in the right way. If I should feel as Dr. Schweitzer does that Christ calls me to a ministry of healing in Africa, then I will do everything in my power to learn all the facts about tropical diseases and to secure the training to minister to them. Or if I should feel as Dr. Malik does that Christ calls me to work for world peace and understanding, then I will do everything possible to learn the facts about the world and about the differences between nations. In doing this, I will be serving Christ and witnessing to my faith in him.

Now this also means that the greatest perversion of faith may not be the doubting of some creed, but the wrong use of our minds. If God has given us minds so we can understand Him and serve Him, and should we use those minds for things that God would not approve or want, then we cannot claim to have a Christian faith. To accept Christ as Lord means that we will use our minds only for those things that Christ would be doing.

Would Christ use his mind to figure out new and better ways to sell cheap or even harmful products through clever advertising?

Would he use his mind to manipulate people like things, in order to make more money for himself? Would he use his mind to create weapons which can destroy millions of people? Would he use his mind to popularize religion so that it looks cheap and easy? These are some of the real questions we must ask ourselves when we start thinking about what it means to accept Christ as the Lord of our minds.

Being converted will not mean changing the processes by which we think. It will not mean stopping those processes with no trespassing signs which say, "No Thinking Here" or "No Doubts Allowed Here." But it will mean a new and an ultimate concern. It will mean that we have one loyalty which transcends and directs all other loyalties—one purpose for which all our mental efforts will be directed.

The need for such an ultimate loyalty is dramatized by John Galsworthy in a play which is entitled "Loyalties." It is the story of an English army officer who stole a large sum of money from a wealthy Jew who was being entertained at the same house party. He took this money to purchase the silence of an Italian girl with whom he had been having an affair. He was about to be married to a fine English girl, and he was afraid that she might learn of this affair. As the play develops, the Jew brings suit against the army captain. The army crowd, motivated by class and racial loyalties, stands by the captain. The Italian girl's father, in devotion to his family, tries to hush up the matter. The captain's wife, through loyalty to her family, stands by her husband. The attorneys insist that loyalty to the standards of their profession will not allow them to take the case. In fact, the loyalties and counter-loyalties become so snarled that one of the characters bitterly remarks, "Criss-cross, we cut each other's throats with the best of motives."

This may be a picture of our world. Family loyalties, class loyalties, community loyalties, professional loyalties, national and

racial loyalties—all these make their claim and their counter claims upon us; and, almost before we know it, we find ourselves cutting each other's throats with the best of motives. Our minds become so perverted and so misdirected that we cannot think straight. Feelings and prejudices take charge, and everyone suffers.

You can be sure of one thing—men's minds are going to be active; they are going to be used in some way. It may be the right way, or it may be the wrong way. Which way they are used is determined by the one question: What is a man's ultimate concern? Where is his supreme loyalty? He may say with Paul, "Christ's whose I am and whom I serve. . . . For me to live is Christ"; or he may say, as some business executives said recently when the courts convicted them: "It was the company policy. I was only doing what the company expected me to do." Or, he may say, with some college students recently interviewed: "Everybody else cheats on examinations. If I am going to pass, I have to cheat too." He may say with thousands in Russia and in China: "It is the Communist goal that I serve. I must do whatever the party says is necessary to forward that goal."

In each case, man's mind is hard at work. It is being pushed to capacity by something more than a mere logical deduction. It is the servant of that which is felt to be most important in a person's life—and that is what we call faith.

Dr. Paul Tillich says:

> "Faith does not mean the belief in assertions for which there is no evidence. But faith means being grasped by a power that is greater than we are, a power that shakes us and turns us and transforms us. . . . Surrender to this power is faith." [2]

In Paul's case, the surrender was to Jesus Christ. In the case of the others named, the surrender was to something else.

Today, as never before, Christ needs our minds. He needs every

[2] Tillich, Paul, *The New Being*, p. 38.

possible part of them and every creative insight they can give. In the field of philosophy, he needs men and women whose minds are clear enough and keen enough to help us see the implications of his teachings in an atomic, space age; he needs men and women who can combat with truth the false ideas and false teachings of communism and materialism which are leading so many astray.

Undeniable truth is still the most potent and powerful weapon. John Milton wrote: "Let truth and falsehood grapple; whoever knew truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?"

In the field of science, Jesus Christ needs people who will devote their minds to the discovery of new and constructive uses for atomic energy and the discovery of ways to prevent or cure such diseases as cancer and heart failure.

In the field of business, Christ needs minds that will find ways to maintain freedom and at the same time control the tendency toward unrestrained monopoly, ways to maintain incentive without allowing men to ride rough-shod over the rights of others.

In the field of government, he needs minds that will find ways to preserve individual liberties and still promote the general welfare of all groups.

In the field of international relations, he needs minds that will discover acceptable solutions to such problems as disarmament and colonialism.

In the field of religion, he needs minds that will point the way toward greater unity and cooperation without the danger of authoritarianism and bureaucracy which so often comes with monopoly and bigness.

These, and many other problems, are still before us. The call of Christ is not for blind faith, but for clear-eyed and hard-headed commitment to the goal of solving these problems. By accepting him as Lord, we accept no less a goal than that of making the kingdoms of this world the Kingdom of our Lord and

our Christ, of working with him to establish justice, to cure disease, to abolish war, to build brotherhood, and to do everything else which is needed before God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. This is the greatest challenge to men's minds that we know anything about.

To each one of us Christ is saying: "Give me your mind, and I will sharpen it, focus it, increase its creativity, and use it in ways you never dreamed were possible." "You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

Few have put this challenge so clearly as Herman Hagedorn in his poem, "The Bomb That Fell on America." Written shortly after Hiroshima, it pictures a man, who represents all mankind, turning to God in bewilderment and fear seeking some way out of his terrible dilemma. At first, he pleads for a miracle; and the reply comes back: "So you want a miracle. . . . My, my! You want a miracle. I suppose you mean that you want me to come sliding down a sunbeam and make one hundred and thirty-five million self-willed egotists overnight into one hundred and thirty-five million cooperative angels." "Brother," said the Lord, in a voice that shook the windows, "that isn't the sort of universe you're living in. And that isn't the sort of God I am. . . . There is only one miracle, and it is already accomplished. That miracle is the human soul."

Then the Lord goes on to describe how hard it is for Him to release all the power that is present in the soul of man. He says it's like trying to get past the electrons to get at the energy which is packed in the nucleus of the atom; but, once in a while, when He pushes through the charged field of man's ego and selfishness, "The nucleus is split, the power is released, and things begin to happen on a scale that makes men gasp and talk about miracles."

Slowly but surely the man begins to see what God is talking about. He begins to see that his pride and his egotism are standing in God's way too. He finds himself alone in a desert, looking at a

man on a cross; and he cries: "This is the end. I am dust, and the wind will scatter me. This is the end. Who shall look Truth in the face, and live?"

Then the Voice says: "This is the beginning, this is daybreak. Give me your life, and day shall be like a new world. The unclean shall be clean, the cowardice, courage, and weakness, power. Give me your life, and I will make it a spade to dig the foundations of a new world, a crowbar to pry loose the rocks, a hoe to mix sand and cement, a trowel to bind stone and stone and make them a wall.

"Man without God is a bubble in the sea, a single grain of sand on an infinite beach. God without man is a mind without tongue or ears or eyes or fingers or feet. God and man together, We are such power as not all the atoms in all Creation can match."

III

Lord of Our Human Relations

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."—Matt. 22:39
"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."
—I John 4:11

Rachel Crothers has written a play entitled "Susan and God." It is the story of a rich, beautiful, intelligent woman who is always being driven by her duty to her club, her family, and various charitable causes. Her latest concern is with a new way to God which she feels that she has found in "Lady Wiggam's movement." It involves bringing people together to pray with one another and to confess their sins to one another. Susan throws herself passionately into this effort to change others by getting them to confess their sins, by counselling with them, by assuring them that "God will help you."

In the meantime, Susan's own daughter, Blossom, is lonesome and neglected in a boarding school; and her husband, Barrie, is an alcoholic who seems driven to drink because of Susan's domineering efforts to control and direct his life for him. But one day Barrie hears Susan make an inspiring talk about how much God can help. He hears her say: "No matter who you are—or what you do—you can be made over." He is deeply moved and, when he gets a chance to be alone with Susan, he says: "If you believe this, Susan, I believe it too. Do you mean He can do something about me, if I ask Him? If you do—I ask Him."

Even though her husband begins to conquer his bad habit through new insight, Susan is more interested in her "movement" than in helping him. She is so wrapped up in her duty to God

and others that she asks for a divorce in order to devote herself more completely to her duty. However, in the end Susan finds she is losing everything that she really wants: her home, her daughter, her love, even God; and as Barrie starts to leave her, she calls him back saying: "You don't know how rotten I've been. . . . I know my own stupidity has done all this to me. I know you are tired of my selfishness. Oh, I want to be so much more to you than I've been before." The play ends with her prayer, "Oh, dear God, don't let me fall down again."

Susan had failed to realize that the Christian injunction to love our neighbor as we do ourselves applies to members of our own family as well as to strangers and foreigners. Too often we have used this commandment for sermons on race relations and class relations, while we have overlooked the more intimate face-to-face relations in our home, in our neighborhoods, in our offices and other places of business. It is easy to become so involved in saving mankind in general that we overlook our duty to be decent and understanding and compassionate in our relations with those we see regularly and know the best. So let's think together about what it means to accept Christ as the Lord of our regular, face-to-face human relations.

To begin with, to accept Jesus Christ as Lord means that we are to have the kind of spirit and attitude which Jesus had in his relations with the twelve disciples. John quotes Jesus as saying: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you." [1] The disciples knew exactly what he meant. His relations with them had made all of them see a new dimension to human love. It was visually symbolized for them when Jesus, on that last night, took a towel, a basin of water, and washed their feet. Ordinarily this was a job for the servant. Jesus, by putting himself in the place of the servant, was showing that

[1] John 13:34.

true love will step into any place where there is a human need. Jesus had said previously to his disciples, "I am among you as one who serves," [2] and here he was giving one final demonstration of what he meant.

John put his finger on the true secret of this kind of self-giving love when he wrote: "Jesus, knowing . . . that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel." [3] In other words, the love of Jesus for others grew out of his trust in God's love. He was able to forgive, because he knew how much God had forgiven. He was able to give much, because he knew how much more God has given. Later, a first-century Christian put it simply when he wrote, "We love, because he first loved us." [4] "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." [5]

Jesus tried to make it clear that love which endures must be based on something more than the lovableness of the other person or upon some fist-clenching determination to love that fellow, even if it kills me.

In order to understand what Jesus meant, it is important to remember that the Greek word, *agape,* which is found in the New Testament manuscripts and which is translated *love,* does not have the same meaning as the one we ordinarily think of today. In Greek, the romantic, desiring love which our poets and song-writers talk about is called *eros;* and this word is not used once in the New Testament. The word, *agape,* which is used, has no sentimental associations and is controlled by a person's will rather than his feelings. It means expressing our love or our good will by our actions. So it is that real love does not mean "liking a person"; but, rather, it means "wishing him well—desiring what

[2] Luke 22:27.
[3] John 13:3-4.
[4] I John 4:19.
[5] I John 4:11.

is best for him." Now this is possible only when a man realizes that this is God's attitude toward him. Paul wrote, "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." [6]

In a human family, older children learn to accept and love the new baby because they sense the love which their parents have both for them and for the new child. In the same way, and only in this way, is the Christian able to love others—because he sees and feels God's love for them. "Man cannot be trusted to love his neighbor without loving God, for without God the neighbor becomes a means to man's ends—something to be manipulated if he can be used, silenced, if he is in the way." [7]

In Rachel Crothers' play, this was Susan's trouble, wasn't it? For her, people—even the members of her own family—were things to be manipulated rather than neighbors to be loved.

If we are going to avoid this mistake, if we are going to love the members of our family and our other associates as God has loved us, what are the guideposts that we should follow? This kind of love will have three marks—marks that are clearly seen in Jesus' relations with his disciples.

First, love faces reality rather than seeks to escape it. It avoids sentimentalism. It begins with a clear recognition that there is something in each one of us that makes it difficult for others to love us. A husband said to his wife: "Why is it that God made women beautiful but dumb?" She replied: "He made us beautiful so our husbands would love us. He made us dumb so we could love our husbands." How true that is! Anyone who looks at himself honestly at all knows there are some terribly unlovable traits in his character. He knows that it takes real Christian charity for anyone to put up with him. There are times when children are infuriating to their parents and when parents are equally in-

[6] Rom. 5:8.
[7] Hamilton, Wm., *The Christian Man,* p. 70.

furiating to their children. There is that in each one of us which requires forbearance, tolerance, forgiveness from those who have to live with us or to be associated with us.

Certainly this was true of the disciples whom Jesus loved. They almost seemed bent on misunderstanding and misinterpreting him. They quarreled among themselves over who was to have the place of honor. They wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village. They tried to talk him out of going up to Jerusalem. They slept when he asked them to keep watch. One of them denied him with curses. Another, betrayed him to his enemies. But, in spite of all this, he still loved them and entrusted his mission to them. Some years later, one of them wrote, "Having loved his own . . . he loved them unto the end." [8]

Bible scholars point out that the word for *love* which is used in the Old Testament basically means *to know*, in the intimate and direct way in which a wife knows her husband or a husband knows his wife. It means a relationship in which every weakness, every little subterfuge with which we hide our selfishness, is known and yet is forgiven. The Psalmist wrote: "O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me . . . thou understandest my thoughts afar off." [9] This is the way in which we are called to love one another.

They say that love is blind; but this is not true of Christian love. It is clear-eyed, realistic—seeing the faults and foibles of the other person, but still wishing and working for only what is best and right for him. In doing this, a real sense of humor is the greatest possible asset. It enables us to see and to laugh at these faults and foibles in ourselves and in others. We have a thirteen-year-old in our home—or at least she was thirteen until she recently became fourteen. We in our family got a big laugh out of May Richstone's little poem in the *Saturday Evening Post:*

[8] John 13:1.
[9] Ps. 103:1, 2.

Love that little girl of yours
With those beguiling ways of hers,
Skipping off to school, a sprite,
A joy, a vision of delight.
Too few years hence, she'll be a bride
And fill parental hearts with pride.
But in between
She'll be thirteen.

Our laughing together over the unlovable traits of a thirteen-year-old helped us to love one another better; and, when our daughter comes back with a cartoon or a poem that shows up the faults of parents, there is another laugh that binds us even closer to one another. Christian love faces reality.

Second, love goes beyond sentimentality to a genuine concern for the well-being of the one loved. Love is intelligent, not mawkish. William Morris wrote a poem entitled, "Love Is Enough"; but one reviewer dismissed it with the brief comment, "It isn't."

The New Testament makes it clear that natural love alone is not enough. Love must be grounded in and redeemed by a true knowledge of God's love. Like God's love, our love must be intelligent and far-sighted. It must desire and do only what is best for the other person; and this means a willingness to see the other person suffer if that suffering is necessary for the growth and development of his character and his mind.

Jesus did not try to shield his disciples from suffering, like an over-protective mother. Instead, he said: "Blessed are you when men shall persecute you"; "You must deny yourself; take up your cross"; "In this world you will have tribulation." This does not mean that we condescendingly say: "Now, this hurts me worse than it hurts you. I'm doing this for your own good."

Virtue's final taint
Is the condescension of the conscious saint.

This love that goes beyond sentimentality and that has a genuine concern for the well-being of the other is like the good schoolteacher whose concern for her students is so great that she will not let them get by with shoddy work or wrong attitudes. Think back over the teachers whom you have had. Aren't the ones who have contributed the most to your life the ones who made you work the hardest, the ones who didn't put up with any nonsense?

Jacques Barzun in his book, *Teacher in America,* says: "Most of the heart-burning in the academic world comes from somebody's yielding to the temptation to be kind at the wrong time." [10] There are many young lives who have gone astray because persons have been kind to them at the wrong time or in the wrong way. Mothers who shelter their children from responsibility, and fathers who get their sons out of one scrape after another are not loving their children as they ought. Christian love seeks what is best for the true growth of the child.

Christian love is like God's love for man as seen in Jesus Christ. Jesus said that God's love is steady and dependable; God makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust. This thought is well described by a line in one of T. S. Eliot's poems. Though he is speaking of the Christian Church, the same could be said of Christian love. He writes: "She is tender where they would be hard, and hard where they would like to be soft."

A third thing about Christian love: it sets the loved ones free rather than enslaves them. This is something Susan, in the play, failed to realize. She was unconsciously trying to maintain a situation where her husband was completely dependent upon her. Would you believe that recent psychiatric studies on the wives or the husbands of alcoholics show that this is often the case? Some-

[10] Quoted in Webb, Lance, *Discovering Love,* p. 46.

times they really don't want their wives or husbands to overcome their alcoholism, because then they would no longer be dependent on them.

But Jesus kept trying to push the disciples out on their own. He did not want them to be so dependent on him that they would be lost when he was gone. He trained them, and sent them out on independent preaching missions. When they found one man preaching in Jesus' name, but not exactly by his pattern they tried to stop him; but Jesus said: "Let him alone. He that is not against us is for us." He encouraged the disciples to feel that they would go beyond his teachings. He said: "He who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do." [11]

There is nothing that is selfishly possessive about Christian love. When my father was a young preacher, people used to say to my circuit-rider grandfather: "I do believe that son of yours is a better preacher than you are." He would proudly reply: "I guess he ought to be. Just look whose shoulders he's standing on."

This may be the most difficult lesson that we parents have to learn: We have to love our children enough that we are willing for them to launch out on their own. We have to love them enough to set them free from our pattern and our way of doing things. As employers, we have the right attitude toward our employees only when we allow them enough freedom to show some individual initiative. As teachers, we can love our pupils properly only when we don't try to enslave them and bind them down just to our way of doing things.

Too much so-called love is possessive and selfish. It is what one psychiatrist calls "momism." He made extensive studies in the psychoneurotic wards of army hospitals; and he concluded that many of the crack-ups had come because of an over-solicitous,

[11] John 14:12.

over-protective "momism" which had kept them from having the freedom which enables children to grow into mature adults.[12]

To summarize: If we are to love others as God loves us, we must follow Christ in genuinely desiring and seeking what is best for them, with a hard-headed realism which sees their faults, accepts the faults without being sentimental, does everything possible to open the way for their elimination, and guards carefully against building the kind of dependence which destroys individual freedom and initiative.

But how is such love possible?

Such love, of course, isn't possible unless we stay mighty close to the source of love. We must be absolutely sure of God's love for us before we can love others the way we should. Then it becomes not my love that I give, but is the love that I received from God.

It is important to keep this series of Bible verses in mind: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

The psychiatrist who examined hundreds of American youth who had been imprisoned by the Communists in Korea said that most of the men who cracked up and abandoned their usual concern for their fellows were those who had had very little if any religious training or whose faith was very superficial. While the few men who were able to think of others and to serve them were generally those who possessed a deep religious faith and who had practiced a healthy kind of prayer life. They had learned the meaning of God's love, and so they were able to love others even when it took great sacrifice.

This is the lesson that we, too, must learn and re-learn. It is the

[12] Strecker, Edward, *Their Mothers' Sons*, p. 30.

lesson learned by the second-century Christians who had to face continuing persecution and who could worship together only in the underground chapels of the catacombs. Their leader was a man named Clement, the Bishop of Rome. He expressed the source and the meaning of their love when he wrote: "He who has love in Christ obeys the commands of Christ. Who can declare the bond of the love of God, and tell the greatness of its beauty? The height to which it leads is unspeakable. Love unites us with God; covers a multitude of sins; beareth all things; endureth all things. There is nothing mean in love, nothing haughty. It knows no division; it is not refractory; it does everything in harmony. In love have all the elect of God become perfect. Without love nothing is pleasing to God." [13]

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

[13] Payne, Robert, *The Fathers of the Western Church*, p. 27.

IV

Lord of Our Concerns

"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be yours as well."—Matt. 6:33

"He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it."—Matt. 10:39

A Memphis schoolteacher recently gave a newspaper reporter an essay which had been turned in by a third-grade boy. The boy wrote: "When I grow up, I want to be a good man. I want to get married, and be like my Mother and Daddy. I am going to join the U.S.A.F. and be an officer in the U.S.A.F. And when I retire some money will come to me every month until I die." Has our obsession for security gone this far? Are eight-year-olds dreaming about money for retirement instead of exploration and adventure?

Lynn Burke, our seventeen-year-old Olympic swimming champion and world-record holder, announced that she is retiring from competition. What is her reason? She said: "The thrill is gone. The goals I worked so hard for, I have reached. There is no more incentive." One recalls Alexander the Great, at the age of 26, weeping because there were no more worlds to conquer.

Recently a college senior wrote about the goals of his life. He said: "I would like to have enough money to be comfortable and somewhat well-to-do. Beyond that it doesn't make any difference. . . . In life the thing I value most is happiness, which to me is roughly material comfort." [1]

[1] Butz, Otto, *The Unsilent Generation.*

Do these examples actually reflect the mood of our day? Someone has said, "This is the age of the shrug"—the age when men just don't care enough to get excited or to be bothered. T. S. Eliot wrote:

> Our age is an age of moderate virtue
> And of moderate vice
> When men will not lay down the Cross
> Because they will never assume it.[2]

Is this true? The Communists say it is. They are openly contemptuous and increasingly bold simply because they don't think we are really concerned about anything except ourselves. One young Communist, who was talking to a Christian leader, said: "We know the Christian gospel is a much more powerful weapon for the renewal of society than is our Marxist philosophy. . . . All the same, it is we who will finally beat you. . . . We Communists do not play with words. We are realists, determined to achieve our object, and we know how to obtain the means. Of our salaries and wages, we keep only what is strictly necessary, and we give the rest for propaganda purposes. To this propaganda we also consecrate all of our free time and a part of our holidays. You, Christians, give only a little time and hardly any money for the spreading of the gospel. . . . Believe me, it is we who will win, for we believe in our Communist message, and we are ready to sacrifice everything, even our lives, in order that social justice shall triumph. But you are afraid to soil your hands."

It was this lack of real concern and commitment which Whittaker Chambers sensed in our American life. You will remember that he was the disillusioned Communist who was the key witness in the Alger Hiss case. A former editor of *Time* magazine, he wrote a forceful book in which he showed up the weaknesses and

[2] Eliot, T. S., from *The Rock.*

the false foundations of both Capitalism and Communism. The foreword to this book is a letter to his children which is a tremendous challenge to this "age of the shrug." He wrote:

> "A man is not primarily a witness *against* something. That is only incidental to the fact that he is a witness *for* something. A witness, in the sense that I am using the word, is a man whose life and faith are so completely one that when the challenge comes to step out and testify for his faith, he does so, disregarding all risks, accepting all consequences."

The most important question which we face today—the most important question for each one of us is: "What are you for? What is your deepest concern? What is it you really want?" Mort Sahl, the popular young New York night club humorist whose brilliant cynicism brings crowds to any club where he speaks, seems to be down on everything. Recently he spoke for millions of American young people when he said, "I wish I had a cause, because I've got a lot of enthusiasm."

All of this would be pathetic if it were not so tragic—an eight-year-old, instead of dreaming about daring adventures, thinking about a good pension in his old age; a seventeen-year-old feeling that all her goals have already been achieved; a college senior whose greatest ambition is to find happiness through material comfort; and a brilliant young humorist who can find no cause which is worth his support.

Where do they get these feelings anyway? The answer seems obvious: they get them from the rest of us. They are simply reflecting the attitude and the spirit of their elders.

One college man in a fraternity bull session said angrily, "The good Christians call us rebels without a cause, but they don't give us a cause." Another member of the same fraternity, John Turner, wrote in *Together* magazine:

"Jesus never taught conformity. He taught his followers to stand out against society. . . . He taught them to dare. He gave them a cause, a cause worth dying for. That is what we, the young, are asking from you, the people of the church. We need a great wind of faith to blow through the fog of our confusion. . . . You who have been guided through your dark jungles by a gleam of brightness, can you not lead us to the source of that light? Somewhere within us there is a humble flicker of idealism. Can't you teach it to soar? We want to believe. Teach us. We have the strength of youth, but we have no armor. Arm us. Give us a cause, a cause worth dying for, a cause to live for."

What can we say? What can we do? It is obvious that we cannot say, "Follow us, and we will show you the way." But we can say this: "Come with us to Christ. We will join you in looking to him. We will join you in confession at the foot of the cross. Here is one who will not let you down. Here is the one whom both of us need.

"He is the only one who has the right to challenge and to claim all that we have and all that we are. We know we have fallen far below what he has the right to expect of us. We have forgotten who we are and whose we are; but we are willing to keep looking at the cross if you are. It is not easy to look at."

"Daily it challenges our pettiness and our preoccupation with the things that do not really matter. It challenges our chaotic desires and appetites. It challenges us to make our religion a deeply ethical experience, and not a cheap aesthetic one. It keeps saying, 'Not everyone that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father.' It keeps insisting, 'He that would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.' It keeps asking us questions—uncomfortable questions: 'Are you willing to live in such a way that other men need not die? Are you willing to die so that other men might live? Are you able to

drink the cup that I drink? Are you able to be crucified with me?' Sometimes—many times—we answer, 'No, the cost is too great.' Sometimes we are in doubt. Sometimes we try to run away. But, try as we will, we cannot escape it, nor the demands which it makes." [3]

Early in his ministry, Jesus called men to leave all and follow him; on the cross he proved that he had the right to make such a demand. Here then is the final answer to anyone who says: "There is no cause which is really worth sacrificing for. There is no leader who is worth my trouble." Anyone who thinks it is easy trying to follow Jesus had better look again at what is expected. To those who are looking for easy peace of mind and comforting platitudes, he still says: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. . . . And he who does not take his cross, and follow me, is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it."

There are only two things we can do with these words and with the Cross that backs them up. We can reject them, turn our backs on them; or we can accept them as God's Word for us. But the most of us are not bold enough to reject them openly. We get around them by rationalizing. We interpret Christ's teachings to fit our own feelings, our own convenience. We turn him into a jolly, easy-going fellow who would fit right into the Rotary Club luncheon; or we make him a rugged and radical reformer who is always out to pick a fight. We sing "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," and we paint pictures of him with a baby in his arms; or we talk about him as the great teacher who, of course, taught the things that we believe.

There are many other ways in which we deny Jesus by simply remodeling him to fit our society, very much as we remodel our

[3] Roupp, Harold, *The Christian Advocate*, June 7, 1956.

homes every few years. This peril of modernizing Jesus is the danger that Dr. Albert Schweitzer has warned against so forcefully in his book, *Quest for the Historical Jesus.* In every age men try to deny the Lordship of Christ by fitting him into their own mold; but it is as the historian, H. G. Wells, has said:

> "From underneath the mass of the miraculous and incredible, the man himself keeps breaking through. . . . He is like some terrible moral huntsman digging mankind out of the snug burrows in which they have lived hitherto. In the white blaze of this kingdom of his there was to be no property, no privilege, no pride and precedence; no motive indeed and no reward but love. Is it any wonder that men were dazzled and blinded and cried out against him? . . . To take him seriously was to enter upon a strange and alarming life, to abandon habits, to control instincts and impulses, to essay an incredible happiness. . . . Is it any wonder that to this day this Galilean is too much for our small hearts?" [4]

And so, we keep trying to escape him. We keep watering him down to suit our taste. He becomes the insipid, meaningless Christ of the typical middle-class church against whom so many of our young people are rebelling. Instead of being the Lord of our concerns—the one who startles and shames and challenges us out of our complacencies—he becomes the Comforter, the soothing doctor who quiets our nerves and soothes our consciences with the assurance that, no matter what we do, God loves us.

But this is not the Christ of the Gospels. True, there is comfort in his strength and in his assurance of God's steadfast love; but H. G. Wells has pointed out that there is also great discomfort as men realize the full implications of discipleship. Peter cries, "De-

[4] Wells, H. G., from *Outline of History,* quoted by Luccock, H., *The Questing Spirit,* p. 634.

part from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." The rich young ruler turns away sorrowfully, even though he has kept all the commandments. Nicodemus is puzzled by the demands of Jesus for a second birth.

This is true in any age. If we look at his life honestly, and then look at our own, something shattering is bound to happen.

The Galilean is too much for our small hearts.

> "He was careless about himself, we are careful. He was courageous, we are cautious. He trusted the untrustworthy, we trust those who have good collateral. He forgave the unforgivable, we forgive those who do not really hurt us. He was righteous and laughed at respectability, we are respectable and smile at righteousness. He was meek, we are ambitious. He saved others, we save ourselves as much as we can. . . . He risked everything for God, we make religion a refuge from every risk." [5]

It's almost enough to make you give up, isn't it? Perhaps that is exactly what we must do. Sören Kierkegaard once said: "The way to become a Christian is to take any one of Jesus' teaching precepts and try to follow it." Think about that a minute. He did not mean this would be so easy and so wonderful that we would quickly become convinced Christians. He meant that, if we really try to follow some particular teaching all the way, we will quickly be driven to our knees with the confession that this is too much for our small hearts. How difficult it is to follow Jesus' command to love our neighbor as we do ourselves!

Take the Sermon on the Mount. If you want something that will really shake you up and cut you down to size, try going through that with the idea that you are going to obey it word for word in your daily actions. If you are really honest, before

[5] Miller, Samuel H., *The Life of the Church*, pp. 46, 47.

you get through you will feel small enough to drop easily through any knothole.

Now this is exactly what God wants, isn't it? God knows that He doesn't have a chance to direct us and use us until we are ready to turn to Him for help. Peter had to come to the place where he cried: "depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man," before he was ready to be made into "the rock"—the one whose faith was to become the foundation of the Christian Church. Then, and only then, was he ready to receive the saving gift of God's love and forgiveness as it could be seen in Jesus on the cross.

John Wesley said: "If a man knows he is fit for hell, then he is fit to come to Christ." Let us put it another way: "The Christian gospel is not that we save ourselves by finding God. It is that God finds and saves us when we let him." [6]

"The only really good man is the forgiven man; the only real sin is the sin of thinking that you do not need forgiveness." [7]

Recently a young English clergyman who is a Bishop of the Church in India spoke in a college chapel. Students who wanted to ask questions were invited to remain afterwards. One student, with a note of anger in his voice, said: "I didn't expect to hear this provincial and narrow message from you, of all people. You've seen so much of our world, but all you talked about was Christ. Why Christ? Why didn't you bring us some insight from Mohammed? Why didn't you bring us some inspiration from Buddha? Wouldn't that have been just as valid?"

The speaker looked at him with a disarming smile and said, "Oh, are you a Moslem?"

"No, I'm not," the student replied.

"Then, said the Bishop, "I take it that Mohammed is not your problem. Are you a Buddhist?"

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[6] Harkness, Georgia, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 170.
[7] Hamilton, William, *The Christian Man*, p. 42.

"Of course not," snapped the boy.

"Then," persisted the Bishop, "Buddha is not your problem. What are you then?"

"Why, I don't know," the boy stammered. "I suppose I'm supposed to be a Christian."

"Now, isn't that amazing?" concluded the Bishop. "I've never had that vague an answer from a Moslem. I've never had that vague an answer from a Buddhist. And I've lived and dealt with them all my life. You know, if I were you, I wouldn't worry myself too much about their faith, until I had made up my own mind about Jesus Christ. It is easy to see that He is your problem."

Yes, Jesus Christ is my problem and yours, isn't he? Pilate said to the crowd who had gathered around the judgment seat in Jerusalem: "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" This is truly the ultimate question that each of us must answer. Either we accept him as Lord, and lose our lives in his service, or we make something else our ultimate concern. We can follow the general mood of our time which is expressed even by young people —the setting up of financial security for old age and material comfort as the ultimate goal, or we can follow the way of Christ. But we cannot follow both. Jesus said: "He who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be yours as well."

Six months before his death from cancer, young Dr. Tom Dooley wrote from his hospital in the jungles of Laos to a medical school graduate:

> "Know that this passing and precarious time in history will demand much of you. It will maroon the hesitant, but inspire the brave. Stand up and shout, 'This is my time and my place in this time!' And seek that place. The state of total gratification is for cows, possibly for birds, not for man. Seek greater things

than the material. Do not aim for just a certain socio-economic position in society. Seek something beyond the split-level ranch house and two-car garage. Become supremely aware of and intimately involved in the great issues of your day. You have the potential for great deeds, and today demands deeds, human deeds. Principles enunciated and hopes expressed are not enough. Remember this."

V

Lord of Our World

"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. . . . for God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him."—John 3:16, 17

"I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."—Isa. 49:6

Everybody today is concerned about the state of world affairs. World War II and its aftermath, along with the development of inter-continental missiles, have taught us that we are one body, whether we like it or not. What happens in the Congo, in Korea, in Laos, in Algiers, may have as much to do with our welfare and our safety as what happens on the other side of town. We talk and think about affairs in these distant lands the way we used to gossip about the neighbors down the street. In Paul's prophetic words, "We are all one body, so that when one member suffers all members suffer." In modern terms this means that if one nation in anger drops hydrogen bombs on another nation, all the rest of the world may be destroyed or hopelessly crippled by atomic fall-out.

What is the relevance of our Christian faith to such a world as this? We speak of Christ as the light of the world. What do we mean by this? Does he really have any light for this world that is so different from the world in which he lived? The Bible makes some far-reaching claims. It identifies Jesus Christ with the ancient prophecy in Isaiah: "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." It says: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son . . . that the world might be saved through him."

Is this really true? Has God really done something in Jesus Christ which can save the world from destroying itself? Is there actually some relevance between one who talked about turning the other cheek and about the power of meekness and the power politics of our day? Can he do something to stop this dizzy armaments race which is leading us to spend $14,000,000 every hour, or $40 each day for every person in the world, on war and preparation for war; while we haggle and worry over where we are going to get enough money for schools and hospitals? Can he do something to solve the problem of over-population which is causing half the people of the world to go to bed hungry every night; while we here in Kansas keep building more grain elevators to store the surplus grain which we cannot use or sell?

Smooth, easy answers to these questions will not do. But let us look again at the great affirmation that Jesus Christ is the salvation of the world. What do we mean by this?

First, we mean that in Jesus Christ God has given us the ultimate standard by which all actions are judged and all power is guided and controlled. When God Himself became a man, this gave infinite value to all men. Never again can men think of themselves or of their fellows as mere animals or things. Jesus not only said that "the hairs of your head are numbered," but he died on a cross to show God's infinite concern for man's salvation. Once men see and accept this fact, their attitude can never be the same again.

In the eighteenth century a slave-owner was converted and became a Christian. Shortly after his conversion he wrote to a friend: "I am beginning to see that even black people are among those for whom Christ died. It may seem to you a dangerous doctrine, but I do not think that the world will ever be very much better until it is acted upon."

When a great French surgeon who was a Christian was called in to perform an operation on the Cardinal Prime Minister of

France, the Cardinal said to him: "You know that you must not expect to treat me as you treat those miserable wretches of yours in the hospital." The surgeon replied, "Your Eminence, every one of those 'miserable wretches' as you call them, is a Prime Minister in my eyes." Because of Jesus Christ, every person is a Prime Minister in God's eyes.

Our Methodist Social Creed says:

> "We test all institutions and practices by their effect upon persons. . . . Since Jesus died for the redemption of human life, we believe we should live to help save man from sin and from every influence which would harm or destroy him." [1]

The practical, far-reaching implications of this Christian standard can be seen in the Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations. It can be seen in the action of the British Commonwealth of nations as they refused membership to the Union of South Africa unless it changed its "apartheid" policy of extreme racial segregation. (By this action, they are saying: "We believe that the dignity and the worth of the individual man is more important even than political solidarity.") The implications can be seen in the increasing claim of small African and Asian nations that they have just as much right to independence and to a full voice in the United Nations as anyone else.

Does all this seem rather nebulous and far-removed from the practical problems of international relations? Indeed, it is most pertinent. If there is one thing that this world needs, it is some standard by which the actions of men and nations may be judged. Before there can be world law, there must be some standard which all will see and accept. In Jesus Christ God has given such a standard. This message is for all men, "You are the sons of God and joint heirs with Christ." [2]

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[1] *Discipline of The Methodist Church*, p. 686.
[2] Romans 8:17.

A second reason why we can say that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior of the world is that, in him, God has not only given us a standard to go by, but He has also given us a road by which to travel. He has shown us, not only what we ought to do and how we ought to feel, but he has also shown us *how* to do it. He does not just say, "This is what you ought to do," he says, "Come, follow me." He speaks to us as one who was tempted as we are tempted, as one who suffered as we suffer, as one whose good motives were misunderstood and rebuffed, as one "who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows." He spoke out of a political situation where human life was so cheap that the Romans crucified two thousand of his neighbors at one time along a highway near Nazareth.

No one can say that Jesus just didn't know human nature. He sat where we sit. During World War I, the British officer, T. E. Lawrence, captured the imagination of the world by the way in which he won over the fierce, independent nomad tribes of the Middle East. He did it by living and working with them. He wrote, "No man could be their leader unless he ate the ranks' food, wore their clothes, lived level with them, and yet appeared better in himself."

Do not these words describe what Jesus Christ has done for us? He has "lived level with us," and yet he appeared so much better in himself that we know we must follow him.

Jesus Christ our Lord calls us to follow a strange way of returning good for evil, of overcoming evil with good, of turning the other cheek, of going the second mile. He says, "They that take the sword shall perish by the sword," and every history book offers undeniable proof of this truth. Even the Russian Communists must bear lip-service to this truth. At the entrance of their great exhibit in New York City two years ago, they placed a large bronze statue of a man beating a sword into a plowshare. They know, as all men must know, that the way of the sword is a deadend street.

Jesus even went a step farther. He insisted that men must substitute love for hate, good will for ill will. There must be a positive effort to return good for evil. "If your enemy hungers, feed him." "Pray for those who despitefully use you." Paul put it this way: "Do not be overcome by evil. Overcome evil with good."

Does this sound far-fetched and unrealistic? Certainly it did to many in his day. It would be like some person in Hungary or in Czechoslovakia today saying: "You must go out of your way to do good things for the Russians. You must pray for them." Yet, unrealistic as it may seem, one must admit that in the long run the way of Jesus Christ was stronger than the way of Caesar. They put Jesus to death on a cross; but today that cross, in symbolic form, stands on top of every great building or monument in the city of Rome.

Few men have a better right to speak on this subject than Dr. Martin Niemoller, the German pastor who suffered in a Nazi concentration camp for four years because he spoke out against Hitler. He has written about how difficult it was for him to accept this way of redemptive good will in his attitude toward the Nazis:

> "In the concentration camp one of those black-uniformed men came into my cell every day to put my meal before me. Usually, I did not look at this man, and I felt relief when he was out of the cell again. I thought, 'He is a son of the devil. I have nothing to do with him, and I have no responsibility for him.' . . . It took God a very long time to teach me a lesson. It was only after more than four years' imprisonment that it dawned upon me that this black-uniformed man coming into my cell with whom I did not want to have any relations, nevertheless was one for whom Christ had died, and that I really could not firmly believe and rely upon the fact that Christ had died for me if I refused to acknowledge that Christ had died for him also."[8]

[8] From a pamphlet published by *Fellowship of Methodist Pacifists.*

Every time I am tempted to say, "Surely, God doesn't really expect us to follow this way of the Cross," I think about this experience of Martin Niemoller. I think about Stephen, the first Christian martyr, praying for those who stoned him to death; and I know that I am simply trying to find excuse. Dr. Niemoller is right when he says:

> "There is only one *crusade*, and that is the way of Jesus from Gethsemane to the palace of Pilate and Herod and to the court of the high priest, and from there to Calvary, carrying his cross. . . . We Christians are called upon to follow in this crusade, and in no other. There is no Christian hope in retaliation or in inflicting force on other people. There is no promise of God for doing this, there is no hope in doing this, but there is a hope in following Christ."

Slowly but surely, the logic of history has brought us to the place where there is really no other way out. Military men and scientists who really know what hydrogen war today would mean are almost unanimous in saying with General MacArthur: "War has become a Frankenstein to destroy both sides. . . . If you lose, you are annihilated. If you win, you stand only to lose." [4] So, whether we like it or not, whether we understand it or not, God has brought us to the place where we must accept Christ's way, or else.

A poem entitled "Ultimatum" states the case:

> Now the frontiers are all closed.
> There is no other country we can run away to.
> There is no ocean we can cross over.
> At last we must turn and live with one another.

[4] In address to American Legion Convention, Jan. 26, 1955.

We cannot escape this day any longer.
We cannot continue to choose between good and evil.
(The good for ourselves, the evil for our neighbors);
We must all bear the equal burden.

At last we who have been running away must turn and face it.
There is no room for hate left in the world we must live in.
Now we must learn love. We can no longer escape it.
We can no longer escape from one another.

Love is no longer a theme for eloquence, or a way of
Life for a few to choose whose hearts can decide it.
It is the sternest necessity; the unequivocal ultimatum.
There is no other way out; there is no country we can flee to.
There is no man on earth who must not face this task now.

Yes, in Christ, God has shown us the way out. But He has also given us the ultimate assurance that this way is the way to victory. One of the things that is most disconcerting about talking with a confirmed Communist is his absolute assurance that his way will win. When Khrushchev says, "We will bury you," he really believes it. He and those who follow him believe that the future is determined, and that there is no escaping the ultimate triumph of the Communist way of life. Remember the statement of the young Communist who was so sure that his side "is going to win."

This same kind of assurance has been the hallmark of true Christian faith from its beginning. In a day when little bands of persecuted Christians were able to worship only when they gathered in the catacombs or in out-of-the-way forest glens, some words were added to the Lord's Prayer which we still repeat to this day. They were confronted by the mighty power of the Roman Emperor, but still they prayed, "For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever." They kept remembering Jesus' words, "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to

give you the Kingdom." They believed with all their hearts that the Almighty Creator of this universe actually had become flesh in Jesus Christ. This meant that those who were committed to Him and to His way were bound to win in the long run.

That is what this strange Book of the Revelation is all about. It was written by a Christian who, like Martin Niemoller, was in a concentration camp. The Romans had him imprisoned on the island of Patmos. They thought that this would intimidate the friends and fellow-travellers of this Christian apostle. They thought that it would frighten him out of this foolish faith. But, instead, he spent his time writing to the Jewish Christians on the outside. He deliberately used some of the weird and symbolic language of apocalyptic writings like the Book of Daniel, because he knew that the Roman censors wouldn't understand what he was talking about while his fellow Christians would.

The one thing he wanted to say to them was this: Don't let the might of Rome frighten or intimidate you. God has acted. He has spoken the final word in Christ. In him is the assurance that the way of love cannot be crushed or defeated. There may be temporary setbacks. There may be mighty struggles. There may be wars and famines, plagues and pestilences; but in Jesus Christ we have the picture of God's ultimate plans for this earth. He is God's medicine for "the healing of the nations." [5] There is nothing that can ultimately defeat the Creator of the Universe. If this is actually His plan and His purpose, then we must hold to it, regardless of what others may say or do. We can do this because we know that "The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord . . . and he shall reign forever and ever." [6]

This has been the song of faith in every age. This has been the undaunted assurance which nothing could shake. Augustine had

[5] Rev. 22:2.
[6] Rev. 11:15.

had it in the fifth century. He was meeting with his priests in Alexandria when a messenger came rushing in to deliver the news that the city of Rome had fallen. There was great consternation and confusion. Many cried: "What will we do? If Rome is destroyed, what is left?" But, the great Bishop called for quiet; and in a few brief but meaningful words, he restored their courage. He said, in effect: "Yes, Rome is destroyed; but remember, we are citizens of the City of God—and this is a city which nothing can destroy."

How much we need this assurance in these days! We are timid and uncertain. We have lost faith in everything. We are always on the defensive, so afraid that someone might accuse us of being fanatics. If only we could recapture something of this assurance of those first Christians! They were closest to Christ; and they were the ones who were most convinced that He was truly Lord of lords and King of kings. Martin Luther knew it when he was confronted by the ultimatum from both the Emperor and the Pope. It seemed that the whole world was against him, but he stood firm and did not recant. He wrote:

> Did we in our own strength confide,
> Our striving would be losing;
> Were not the right Man on our side,
> The Man of God's own choosing:
> Dost ask who that may be?
> Christ Jesus, it is He;
> Lord Sabaoth, His Name,
> From age to age the same,
> And He must win the battle.

Yes, He must and He will. In Him we have our ultimate standard for judging all human relations. In Him we have our ultimate direction and way of life. In Him we have our ultimate assurance. For God did send His Son into the world that the world through Him might be saved.

VI

Lord of The Church

"He has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body."—Eph. 1:22

"It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you have made it a den of robbers."—Luke 19:45

Palm Sunday brings to mind a picture of boys and girls, running ahead of a man on a donkey, waving palm branches and joining with their parents in proclaiming that this man is their King, their Lord.

Today, if you will go with our Kansas missionary, Douglas Coole, up the Rejang River in Northern Borneo to visit the Iban tribesmen, who are still spoken of by many as the "wild men of Borneo," children will greet your boat as it docks by holding up three fingers and shouting, "Isa Ke Tuhan," which means "Jesus Is Lord." The children will stand at the altar to join the church and to say, "We accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord."

What do these children mean by this? What conception of Christ do they get from the Church? As you know, it is hard for children to think in abstract terms. For them, Christ and the Church are synonymous. Paul often referred to the Church as the body of Christ. For children, this is literally true. For them, being a follower of Christ means being like those they know in the Church. But this is not only true for children, it is also true for others. There is a very real sense in which the world judges Christ by his Church.

What do they see when they look at the Church today? Do they really see Christ, or do they see a grotesque caricature? Can we

honestly say that he is the Lord of the Church? What would happen if he walked into church as he did into the Temple in Jerusalem? He felt compelled to cleanse the Temple. Would he feel the same compulsion here? The word, "Church," which comes from the old English, "kirk," the Greek "kuriakon," means "the Lord's house" or "that which belongs to the Lord." What do you think—can we really say, "This is the Lord's house"?

They say that a few years ago in New York, one Monday posters appeared all over the city announcing that on the following Sunday night at 7:30 o'clock Jesus Christ would speak in that city. On Tuesday, there were billboards with this announcement. Curiosity ran high. No one knew where the signs were coming from. The next Sunday night the churches were crowded, but the ministers were puzzled. As they stepped into their pulpits, they did not recognize any of the people in their congregations. A strange thing had happened. Instead of going to their own church, the people had gone to other churches. All were sure that, if Christ was to speak, he would not be speaking in their church.

Now that is just a story, but it reveals people's attitude toward their own church. When we think of our church in relation to Jesus Christ, we know it is a long way from being what it ought to be. Someone has said: "The church is always under the judgment of the word whose duty it is to proclaim." That is the reason that the strongest and most pertinent criticism of the church often comes from those who are on the inside and who know it best.

A hopeful sign of our day is the fact that so many church leaders and lay people are recognizing and pointing to the weaknesses and sins of the church. At the convocation of Methodist district superintendents, Dr. Marvin Stuart said: "Christianity is the most revolutionary movement in the world, and the tragedy is that in a revolutionary world the church has often seemed reactionary."

An extensive survey, just completed by the research department

of the National Council of Churches, points up the fact that leaders of all the member churches are extremely dissatisfied with the church the way it is today. They are saying that it has a long way to go before it can be thought of as the body of Christ. They point to the tendency of many churches to become little more than social clubs, which make no real demands on their members. They say that laymen seldom think of themselves as custodians of the gospel and as witnesses for Christ, but feel that they can hire preachers to do these things for them. They feel that ministers, on the other hand, are too prone to proclaim pious platitudes instead of grappling with the meaning of God's Word for the real problems of our day. They say that the lack of unity and cooperation among churches is a disgrace.

Similar feelings are reported by *Fortune* magazine in an article entitled, "Can Protestantism Hold Its Own in a Modern America?" It points to the strange paradox of a church which is numerically and financially stronger than ever before, but which evidently is having very little effect on the moral climate of our nation. It says that this is symbolized by a city like Nashville, Tennessee. With a population of only 170,000,* it has 250 churches. This is twelve times more churches in proportion to population than the city of Rome. Nashville has major headquarters offices and publishing houses for The Methodist Church, the Church of Christ, the Southern Baptist Church, and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. But Nashville ranks seventh in its crime rate among all cities in this country.

It is obvious that in Nashville, and in hundreds of similar cities, church membership is having very little if any effect on the moral and social life of unchurched people. The *Fortune* article quotes Dr. Will Herberg of our Methodist seminary at Drew as

*Since this article appeared in February 1961, the city limits have been extended and the population is now larger.

saying that the reason for this is that "the United States has embraced a religion-in-general that is progressively evacuated of content. Christianity amounts to little more than a vague spirit of friendliness, a willingness to support churches—provided these churches demand no real sacrifices and preach no exacting doctrines." He calls this the "ethos of sociability." In similar vein, a Methodist Church School editor is quoted as saying, "Protestantism, at the grass-roots level, has degenerated into sentimentality."

These are strong words. You may say, "This is not true of the church that I know." But let's not be too sure! It seems that the best church is the one which is constantly trying to look at itself through the eyes of Christ. To paraphrase some words of Kierkegaard: "It knows there are no Christian churches. There are only churches that are becoming Christian." Conversely, there may also be churches that are becoming less Christian.

The question that we really want to ask is this: "Is our church growing in Christlikeness? Are we actually trying to follow the Master, or do we keep turning away from him because his standards are too demanding? Dr. Truman Douglas says: "If the church is to direct man's thoughts towards the fact of Christ's lordship, it must exhibit the willingness to bring its own life under his governance." [1] What does this mean? Obviously, it means many things. Let us name three: If Christ is the head of the church, it will be (1) a worshiping fellowship; (2) a witnessing fellowship; and (3) a serving fellowship.

First of all, a worshiping fellowship. Jesus said that God's house is to be a house of prayer. If it is not that, then it can be none of the other things that it ought to be.

But worship means many things to many people. To some, it means a sentimental withdrawal from the realities of the world. It means soft music, beautiful ritual, comforting assurances; or it

[1] Douglas, Truman, *The Christian Century*, Jan. 25, 1961, p. 107.

means loud, jazzy hymns and sermons that make one cry. Still others may think of worship simply as an intellectual exercise which never touches their emotions.

The truth about worship is to be found in Jesus' attitude toward prayer. Jesus withdrew from the world in order to pray. He spent forty days in the wilderness before he started preaching. He took his disciples up on a mountain for a day and a night in prayer. He left the Upper Room and went into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. He did not join with the Essenes in their monastary by the Dead Sea; nor did he lose himself in the elaborate rituals of the Temple.

For Jesus, prayer was like a soldier reporting to his superior officer to get his marching orders for the day. It was no effort to escape the battle; but only an effort to be sure that he was fighting where he was most needed. It was saying with Isaiah, "Here am I, Lord, send me." It was praying, "Not my will, but Thine be done."

Prayer and worship are not options. They are absolute essentials for Christian living. Martin Luther once said: "I have an important and busy day tomorrow. I must get up an hour earlier for prayer." But this kind of private prayer needs to be bolstered and strengthened by group worship. It's hard to know what group worship does that cannot come through private prayer; yet most of us have experienced the extra strength that comes from such worship. We know that there is a greater strength from common worship than from closet worship. A Jewish proverb says, "Where nine or ten are gathered together in holiness, there is the majesty of God."

A young matron was trying to put this idea into words when she described hers and her neighbor's experience in a modern suburb. For three years, they had no church. She said: "You know, we tried everything we could think of to make this place something other than a real-estate development. We tried organ-

ized recreation, community picnics, and square dancing. We formed a woman's club. We had a parents' organization and evening discussion groups. We tried everything. But it was not until the church came that we changed from a subdivision into a community and became real neighbors to one another." There was something about that experience of worshiping together which brought them together in a completely unique and transforming way. The early Christians realized this; they risked their very lives in order to gather in the catacombs for worship. Christ can be known as Lord only in a church whose members meet together regularly for worship.

The *second* requirement of a church under the Lordship of Christ is that it must be a witnessing fellowship. Jesus' last word to his disciples was, "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." [2] We say that we believe in the gospel. *Gospel* means *good news*. Whoever heard of anyone who really had some good news trying to keep it to himself?

D. T. Niles, the great English preacher, says, "Evangelism is one beggar telling another where to get bread." If we really believe that Christ is the bread of life, if he has actually satisfied our spiritual hunger, then we feel compelled to tell someone else about it. But we will do it in our own words, our own way. This is no place for pious platitudes that we have heard someone else use. It must be natural and real.

The world today is quick to spot a phony; and that is exactly what you are, if you try to pose as something you are not, or if you try to use someone else's language. The witnessing church is one whose members speak as naturally and as freely about their religious experiences as they do about other phases of their lives.

Even more, a witnessing church witnesses through the daily

[2] Acts 1:8.

lives of its members. Their deeds say far more than their words. In Calcutta, a mission executive went to a photographer's shop to pick up some colored slides that he had left there to be developed. The Brahman owner asked him if he wanted to see his pictures projected on a screen. Finally the reason for this request was made clear. He came to the picture of a missionary nurse holding in her bare hands the foot of a man afflicted with leprosy as she bound up his wounds. Then, the Brahman said, "What I want to know is the secret of that? Why is she doing a thing like that?" That Christian nurse was bearing witness to the meaning of Christian love in a way that no words could ever have done.

Every Christian is called to witness in the same way. Regardless of what we do, whether we bandage a wound or teach a history lesson, whether we sell an insurance policy or fill a prescription; as Christians, God expects us to act in such a way that others will say, "What is the secret of that way of life?" This is the kind of witnessing which is desperately needed today.

Too often we are getting a witness in the other direction. Recently a thoughtful journalist spoke to a minister's group. He said that he had served for two years as president of the town council in a prosperous suburb which had a large number of strong churches. A high percentage of the citizens belonged to those churches; but he said that if someone had been leaning over his shoulder during all of his contacts with these citizens, asking him to point out who were church members and who were not, he could not have done so. In fact, he said he could not remember a single instance where a man's church affiliation had made a distinct and observable difference in the way he acted in his dealings with the city government. Someone has suggested that we are now in a religious boom and a character bust. What we church members and ministers *are* speaks so loud, men cannot hear what our churches are saying.

A *third* characteristic is clearly demanded of a church which

accepts Christ as Lord. It must be a serving fellowship. Jesus said, "I am among you as one who serves," and his life makes it clear that he meant the kind of service which loses itself in the needs of others. It is not the lady-bountiful service which delivers baskets at Thanksgiving and Christmas and then feels real good over what it has done for others. But, rather, it is the kind of service which becomes so involved and so concerned with meeting the needs of others that it doesn't stop to think about why it is being done.

This is visualized to me in my friend, Murray Dickson, brilliant, talented, but devoting his life to meeting the needs of the illiterate Indians of Bolivia. Why does he do it? Simply because he saw a great need, and felt he could do something about it. As you talk with him, there is not the slightest hint that he feels he is making a big sacrifice. Instead, you get the feeling that he is having the time of his life. That is the way Christian service should be. That is the way the Church should serve.

Methodist hospitals were started because there was a need to be met. Methodist orphanages were established because there were orphan children to be cared for. Homes for the aged are being built because older people are lonely and need companionship and care. There is also a desperate need of hospitals and homes for the chronically ill. Christian churches should be meeting that need. These are the kind of things we can do together that we could never do as individual Christians.

If the Church ever stops extending itself and sacrificing and going into debt in order to meet these human needs, it will cease being the body of Christ. You simply cannot follow Christ unless you are willing to join with him in healing the sick, caring for the orphans, comforting the lonely, and lifting up the down-trodden.

The children along the Rejan River in Borneo hold up three fingers and shout, "Isa Ke Tuhan." The children stand at the altar

on Palm Sunday and say, "We accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord." But whether it is said in Borneo or in Topeka, it means the same. It means that we want to be bound together in such a way and in such a fellowship that Christ may live and work through us. We want God to make us the body of Christ.

VII

Lord of Our Future

"We have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."—I Peter 1:3

"If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. . . . Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."—I Cor. 15:14, 57

Monday before Easter, as I began trying to finalize what I might say in the Easter sermon, I picked up my morning paper and read this news story from Fort Lauderdale, Florida: "Police turned fire hoses on a rioting crowd of about 3,500 vacationing college students Sunday night and threatened to use tear gas unless the oceanside demonstration ceased. . . . Police Chief J. Lester Holt said the disturbance apparently started when the college students, gathered here for an Easter vacation of beer drinking and sunbathing, left the taverns and sandy beach and tried to stop traffic on the busy highway. . . . Holt estimated 50 students had been arrested and at least 25 injured by flying glass from broken beer bottles."

After I finished reading the paper, I got in my car and drove down to the church. As I turned on to Topeka Boulevard, I found myself right behind a huge tank truck. Across the tank in large letters were the words, "Liquid Nitrogen, United States Air Force"; and I realized that this must be fuel which was being brought in for the guided missiles which are being activated in a ring of bases around Topeka.

Then, as I turned my car into the outside lane to pull around the slow-moving truck, the newscaster on the car radio brought a

report on the latest Communist inspired violence in Africa and in Laos.

All of these things made me ask myself: "Do you really have anything to say next Sunday that will be pertinent to this kind of world? What possible significance can Easter have for brilliant, blasé college youth who think of Palm Sunday and Holy Week primarily as a time for a beer-bust and a brawl? What meaning does Easter have for a world where liquid nitrogen is being pumped into guided missiles with hydrogen bomb warheads which are now being poised in their underground barrels so that the pushing of a button can send them on their way to destroy a nation? What assurance can Easter bring to a world where one country after another is being taken over by a Godless Communism?"

These were the questions I could not escape. These were the questions which forbade my saying anything sweet or sentimental or irrelevant. They made me realize more keenly than ever that I what I say must be absolutely pertinent, or it will be absolutely impertinent. This is no time for simply repeating a beautiful story about the ghost of a great teacher who kept appearing to some of his frightened and discouraged pupils over 1900 years ago. The cold, hard facts of our world call for something more than beautiful ghost stories; and if that is all I have to tell you about the meaning of Easter, then I might as well keep quiet. But I don't have to do that, because I believe with all my heart that God's raising of Jesus Christ from the dead was His word for just such a time as this. I would join with the author of First Peter in insisting that "we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Both Peter and Paul preached this Easter message to a world that was confronted by many of the same problems that we face. Certainly there were many in that first century who were like these twentieth-century college students in their cynical and blatant pursuit of pleasure. In fact, the very first written account of the

Resurrection was Paul's version in a letter addressed to the Christians of Corinth. They were living in a city which was known all over the world for its wild parties and its loose living. As a large seaport, its moral standards were extremely low. Thousands of sailors spent their shore-leave here while their ships were being towed across the narrow isthmus from the Aegean to the Adriatic Sea. The temple to Venus which was located in Corinth maintained hundreds of temple prostitutes. In Paul's day to say that a man was "Corinthianizing" meant what we mean when we say he was "having a fling."

To such a situation, Paul wrote, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." If the dead are not raised, we might as well eat, drink and be merry with the rest of them. All we have to look forward to is death anyway. But Christ has shown us that there is a better way, and that this is the way to eternal life. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, the reason that many people waste their time and pervert their lives with the kind of living symbolized by these students on the beach in Florida or those sailors in Corinth is the feeling that goodness does not pay and that the only reason for living is to squeeze out of it everything that one can get for oneself. Jesus Christ came to challenge this philosophy of life.

Jesus taught that the greatest happiness comes to those who live by God's plan—those who treat all men as their brothers and their own bodies as temples of God's spirit. He insisted that, instead of self-seeking, there must be self-sacrifice. He demonstrated what he meant by his own life. But what did it get him? He was misunderstood by his friends, hated by the leaders of morality and religion, hanged on a cross by a foreign conqueror.

At first, it seemed the "Corinthianizers" were right—that it's best just to eat, drink, and be merry while one can. But this was not the end of the matter. God raised Jesus Christ from the dead

to prove that goodness does pay and to make men realize that his kind of life is the only thing worth aiming for. If it is true that this life is only the beginning, the foundation of an eternal life, then everything that we do takes on new significance. The message of Easter is pertinent, because it makes Christlike life worth living. It says that God will see that goodness lives on.

What are your aims in life anyway? What is your real purpose?

In my library is a beautiful book, entitled *They Built for Eternity*. Judged by its title, the book might be the story of Jesus and his disciples, but it isn't. This book is the pictorial story of the great buildings and cities erected by man. A German scholar named Gustav Vedat has spent his life visiting, studying, and photographing the architectural wonders of the world. His pictures and his comments are presented in this unusual book. You can visit with him the massive ruins of Babylon, Thebes, Luxor, Baalbek, Athens, Jerusalem, Rome, and others. He writes:

> "I have stood in awe and wonder before that which the spirit of men in the course of the centuries has been able to create. . . . Yet again and again I have seen with dismay how everything, literally everything, has gone to pieces. . . . Transitoriness is written over everything on earth. There is no escape from that. Men and kingdoms, races and cultures, come and go." [1]

"What are we living for?" he asks. "Above all the ruins of man's building, does anything endure for eternity?" He answers, "As Christians, we can pronounce a ringing 'yes.' Our answer is given by God in the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The man who accepts this gift is not merely comforting himself with heavenly prospects. Rather, for the first time he knows precisely what to do with his life because he has laid hold of a

[1] Gedat, Gustav-Adolf, *They Built for Eternity*, p. 5, p. 163.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 167.

divine meaning which overarches time and eternity." [2] Yes, the Christian can sing:

"In the Cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time."

The empty cross, the risen Christ, is God's answer to those who see no rhyme nor reason to life. It is His answer to those cynical, pleasure-seeking students on the Florida beach, and to their elders who have failed to show them a better way. To them and to us, God is saying: "Efforts to live the good life are not in vain. The evil and self-seeking forces may mock at goodness and crucify love; but, the third day comes. Christ lives; and because he lives, you can live also." "Whosoever liveth and believeth in him shall never die."

The Easter message not only makes Christlike life worth living, it also makes the world worth changing. Contrary to popular belief, Easter is not an effort to make men forget the evils of this world by pointing to the joys of heaven. The New Testament clearly says that God sent His Son into the world that the world through him might be saved.[3] Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth." God spoke through the risen Christ, saying, "Go into all the world."

Does this sound like escapism? Does this sound like what the Communists call an "opiate of the people"? It seems significant that most of the poems in *Dr. Zhivago*, the Pulitzer novel banned by the Russian Communists, are about "resurrection." The Communists see, perhaps more clearly than we do, that the message of Easter is the most revolutionary in the world. They see that it gives the lie to their crass doctrine of dialectical materialism. They know that if the resurrection of Christ is true, Communism and all that it stands for is false.

[3] John 3:17.

The New Testament reports that the Romans of the first century referred to the Christians as those who "turn the world upside down." Why was this? As you read their sermons in the book of Acts or the letters of Paul, you find that the central theme of all of them is the resurrection of Christ. What does that have to do with reform and revolution? How could the Romans say that this kind of preaching "turns the world upside down"?

It seems that they realized, even as the Communists do today, that once people become convinced that the way of force and the way of self-seeking do not have the final word, there is no way to keep them subservient and satisfied with injustice and inequality. If, as Jesus taught, it really is God's will that all men should live together as brothers, and that none should lord it over others, then no amount of force or false propaganda can keep them from striving for that way of life. The author of the Revelation wrote from the Roman concentration camp, "the kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdom of our Lord . . . and he shall reign forever and ever."

Once men have seen and understood Christ, once they are convinced that he really represents God's will, then their ultimate loyalty will be to him, and to a society which recognizes the infinite worth of each person. They will be working that his Kingdom may come on earth as it is in heaven; and that, any way you look at it, means revolution.

One of the greatest obstacles to true reform is the feeling that no matter how hard Christian people may work, there is just so much evil in the world that they can't do much to change things. Racial discrimination is wrong; the crude disregard by the liquor and gambling interests for human life and moral values is wrong, economic exploitation by labor or by management is wrong; war is wrong—but what in the world can we do about them? Suppose we do struggle and work for justice and truth and right, what good will it do? Will anything come of it?

This must have been the feeling of the two disciples who walked toward Emmaus on that first Easter. They were dejected and discouraged as the stranger began walking with them. They said to him: "We had placed all our hopes on Jesus. We felt sure he was the one who would restore Israel and make our society what God intends it to be. But now he is a broken thing in a borrowed tomb, crucified like a common thief." It was not until they stopped and broke bread together that they recognized their companion as the leader whom they thought had failed. They were overjoyed, and they rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the others.

To them, this Resurrection meant one thing primarily. They had not been wrong in following Christ. It meant that his way was the way to victory after all. It meant there is no evil powerful enough and no hate bitter enough to keep the things of Christ in the grave. Truth crushed to earth will rise again. It may be postponed, but not conquered; deferred, but not defeated. It is not Pontius Pilate, but Jesus Christ who has spoken the last word. His is the "kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever."

Easter also brings the assurance that it is worth every effort we make trying to reform and change the world. We can be sure that in "all things God is working for good with those who love him"; and so, we can throw ourselves into our work shouting, "If God be for us, who can be against us? . . . Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now this does not mean that God will support all of our reform movements. The Pharisees of Jesus' day were leaders of a great reform movement in Judaism. They were the Puritans of that day, and they were determined to bring in God's Kingdom by making sure that everyone obeyed every jot and tittle of the Mosaic law code. In their zeal, they got to thinking of themselves as being much better than the common people who sometimes broke the law.

Jesus denounced them for their self-righteous pride. He called them blind leaders of the blind, and suggested that tax-collectors and harlots who were humble and penitent would be accepted in God's Kingdom before they were.

This should serve as warning to us that our lives and our society may also be judged by Christ. We so often think of the living Christ standing among us and saying, "Peace, I leave with you." But the fact is that his coming may be a most painful and searing experience—the kind of experience that it was for Paul on the road to Damascus. In the light of his holiness and his goodness, no one of us can stand. Our homes, our social agencies, our churches, our governments—all fall short when they are judged by his standards. What are we to do then? Is there really no hope after all?

John assures us, "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. The only condemnation is that light has come into the world and men have loved darkness rather than light." The living Christ today stands ready to give us a fresh start and the power to overcome our sins, even as he did Peter, the man who had denied him three times. He said to him: "Peter, I am trusting you to feed my sheep. I am counting on you to be the shepherd in my place." From that moment on, Peter became the dauntless preacher who could not be stopped by threats or imprisonment or torture.

You can be sure that this same Christ is also ready to forgive you and to use you in his service. He will take you just as you are; but he will expect you to let him change you as he will. You must be willing to say to him, "Not my will, but thine be done." In doing this, for you there will be a completely new and wonderful meaning to Easter.

Easter will no longer be a story of strange things that happened to other people. It will become the wonderful thing that has

happened to you. You will know that Christ lives, not because you have read it in a book, but because you have felt it in your heart and found him by your side as you struggled to live as he lived.

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